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## Corn

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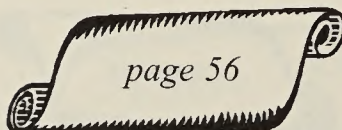
## Corn

The wind has changed. It blows across the dry field with an urgency; as if to give notice of impending change. It is dusk. We're buying a pumpkin on one of those suburban farms. The kind that developers nibble away at, one subdivision and strip mall at a time until the farmer stands resolute on a small patch of growth, his John Deere inaudible amid the blare of nearby highways and descending jumbo jets.

The old farmer smiles at my son, who looks more like a man than a boy to me lately. He extends a weathered hand, which, like his face, is thick with wrinkles and permanently tan.

The pumpkin patch is at the edge of a cornfield. Seven-foot stalks, not so long ago green and strong, stand yellowed and broken in perfectly cultivated rows behind the pumpkins. In the fading night, the pumpkins look fake. Like food for giants; bright orange balls with leafy vines that twist and gnarl against the drying stalks.

It's a pick your own thing



and my son and I are in the dirt inspecting and turning; searching for perfection. The farmer is with us in the patch. He is patiently answering the pumpkin questions of a tiny child.

Amazing how well we listen to the conversations of others as we keep busy pretending to be busy. Our ears strain to hear. She has asked why there is no corn. The farmer explains to her that the season has passed, that the stalks have given all that is required of them. Satisfied, she waits a minute and asks why the stalks are broken and yellow, she asks if they get green again next year.

The farmer tells her no. There is something in his gentle voice that makes me turn to look at him. He is kneeling on the ground next to her. He points to the field and waves his hand towards the stalks. His eyes sweep across the darkened field. "There in the corn," he says, "is the cycle of life."

He explains how he plants and waters, and how, under the warmth of the sun, the earth gives life to the stalks.



Then the stalks give corn, people eat the corn and it gives them life. When the stalks are done making corn the life in them goes back into the earth. He leaves them there, he tells her, because he mustn't touch them until they have given every bit of life back into the ground where it came from.

The wind smells like leaves and Halloween. It bites at the outsides of our ears. The moon has begun to dust the field and the pumpkins with that silvery glow it saves for autumn. We find the perfect one and my son smiles at the farmer. He comes over instantly, compliments us as he looks over our choice, an expert encouraging the novices. He pulls a pocket knife from his belt and cuts through the thick vine in one effortless motion. I dig away underneath it so my son can get a grip and the earth in my hands is warm still from the day's sun and it comforts me.

As we walk to the car, my son surprises me with his strength, the wind rustles our hair. It blows stronger as the

night falls. It whispers to me; soft, indiscernible messages, like the voice of God, as we walk to our car.

Today, I learned that my sister is pregnant. Her child is due in May. Nine months from the end of August. That's when my dad died, one hot summer night when the crickets stilled and the heat retreated — and time slowed to a stop. His soul, released from its broken machine, slipped between the rafters of my roof.

By: Janet Petrine

*"Better guide well the young than reclaim them when they are old."*

- Joseph Malin